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**The Way Ahead: CENTCOM's New Strategy for
Theater Security Cooperation**

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the
requirements of the Joint Maritime Operations Department.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by
the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| The importance of TSC and how the GCC/ PSF can play a role | 2 |
| Why the GCC/ PSF (Who, What, Where) | 6 |
| The future of Theater Security Cooperation in the CENTCOM region | 9 |
| Conclusion | 12 |
| Recommendations | 14 |
| Bibliography | 18 |

Abstract

Security and stability in the Arabian Gulf is not only a regional issue but one of also global concern considering the strategic importance of its resources and the level of political stability. Since the end of the Gulf War the United States has committed itself to an active permanent military presence in the Middle East. The U.S. constructed and executed a U.S. led security architecture composed of a constant forward deployed U.S. military presence and a narrowly focused engagement strategy aimed at boosting partnership and host nation defense capabilities. This architecture was successful in some instances, but largely ineffective in its goal of promoting regional security cooperation that collectively handles crisis, deters future aggression and reduces U.S. footprint and involvement. This paper will argue that a new Theater Security Cooperation Strategy is required and that because of the Peninsula's importance and its numerous common security challenges, the countries of the Arabian Peninsula which make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) should not only be key partners in the development of this strategy, but should become the leading force that will pair nations together with the U.S. to build partnership capacity and promote regional stability.

Introduction

The stability and security of the United States and partner nations across the globe hinge upon the ability to work together in a mutual effort to confront and defeat common security challenges. A key piece to accomplishing this lofty goal within a specific AOR is the Combatant Commanders (COCOM) Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) plan. Currently within Central Command (CENTCOM) there is a comprehensive strategy that has proven largely ineffective and if nations within that region, as well as the U.S., are to be successful at thwarting future challenges, the current strategy must be reformed.

Today CENTCOM is ravaged with countless security issues such as transnational terrorism, political instability among its neighbors, militias and criminal groups, the enduring need to protect the free flow of trade, illegal drug production and trafficking, halting the proliferation of WMD and related technology, countering piracy, and deterring aggression from belligerent nations.¹ At a recent security conference in Washington DC, Defense Secretary Robert Gates spoke in depth about how today's security environment in the Gulf poses dilemmas and opportunities that span all borders. Through this, it becomes apparent that the security challenges faced in the CENTCOM region can be a unifying force for focusing regional attention and increasing cooperation, thus, CENTCOM planners, as well as regional partners, must understand that no nation can protect itself from these threats without cooperation from others. Collective action and comprehensive approaches are required to address these issues.

Fortunately for CENTCOM planners tasked with restructuring this new security architecture, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a cooperative minded security regime already established that can provide the region with a focus on common interest, inclusivity, and capacity building. The GCC is an organization comprised of regional partnerships that are capable and willing

nations focused on building mutual security, deterring aggression, and providing the underlying conditions for success if military action is required. Therefore, CENTCOM planners must shift the current TSC plan from a U.S. centric approach to a new comprehensive engagement strategy that focuses on the Gulf Coalition Council (GCC) and Peninsula Shield Force (PSF) as leading entities to address security, stability and cooperation with the region.

The importance of TSC and how the GCC/ PSF can play a role

Despite the strategic importance of an effective Theater Security Cooperation plan, there is very little current, concise, and comprehensive guidance available on how to construct and implement an effective strategy. A sound and effective TSC plan can be a useful tool for the geographic commander because it directly supports national goals at the regional level, and enhances military operations by negating the need for military action, or by preparing the environment better for U.S. military intervention, should the need arise. To be effective, theater strategy and theater security cooperation must originate from and be inherently linked to national and multinational strategic guidance and policies, and formulated to meet the requirements of each region.²

Today, it is clear for the CENTCOM commander that U.S. national security priorities are focused more towards the building of partnerships and the prevention of conflicts.³ Even with the lack of a clear governing document such as a current National Security Strategy, the Obama administration has made it abundantly clear that the way to achieve real national security is through building stronger mechanisms of security cooperation throughout the world.⁴ This is important for CENTCOM because theater security cooperation, by directly supporting the goals of national security, gives the COCOM that operational and strategic level tool to champion cooperative security within the region.

At the operational level, the overall combatant commander's theater security cooperation program is the interpretation of national security direction. Most significantly, a sound TSC is built from the foundation of a regional strategic appraisal. CENTCOM commander, General David Patraeus released his strategic review statement (Posture Statement) in April of 2009. In this document, he systematically breaks down his theater of operation and discusses in detail the current issues affecting his region and how, in his view, the most effective way to deal with them is through engagement and cooperation.

We face, in this region, a number of interrelated threats and challenges, from transnational to state-centric, to those who blur the lines between the two. Approaches to solve these issues involve significantly more than the application of just military or kinetic action; in fact, we must do far more if we are to address not just the symptoms of current challenges, but also their underlying causes.⁵

The Middle East region presents perhaps the most diverse set of challenges to establishing an effective theater engagement plan. With security concerns such as reducing terrorism, reducing illegal drug production and trafficking, responding to environmental disasters, halting the proliferation of WMD and related technology, countering piracy, and deterring aggression, the security challenges faced in the CENTCOM AOR are abundant and extremely complex. However, these challenges are common among its members and can be a unifying force for focusing regional attention and promoting cooperation because no nation can protect itself from these threats without cooperation from others.

Along with being a region riddled with diverse challenges, the lands and waters of the CENTCOM AOR span several critical and distinct regions and are critical to the economic viability of its inhabitants. Stretching across more than 4.6 million square miles and 20 countries, the AOR contains vital transportation and trade routes, including the Red Sea, the Northern

Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Gulf, as well as strategic maritime choke points at the Suez Canal, the Bab el Mandeb, and the Strait of Hormuz. The CENTCOM AOR encompasses the world's most energy-rich region, with the Arabian Gulf region and Central Asia together accounting for at least 64 percent of the world's petroleum reserves, 34 percent of its crude oil production, and 46 percent of its natural gas reserves.⁶ Because of the vitality of this region as well as the perceived vulnerability, the mission of those charged with its security must be clear and all encompassing.

The CENTCOM mission is to conduct operations to attack, disrupt and defeat terrorism, deter and defeat adversaries, deny access to weapons of mass destruction, assure regional access, strengthen regional stability, build the self-reliance of partner nations' security forces, and protect the vital interests of the U.S. within the area of responsibility.⁷ This broad and complex mission is directly linked to the president's National Security Strategy and is executed via the Theater Security Cooperation plan.

Given the fact that previous security models aimed at cooperative security within the AOR have failed, CENTCOM planners must develop a new model based on strengthening existing relationships and establishing regional partnerships necessary to provide collective security across the broad spectrum of threats facing peaceful nations in the region. In other words..."a paradigm shift in a US-centric approach to security is needed in order to construct a multilateral regional security cooperation organization that would complement existing bilateral security arrangements. The following four conditions are necessary in order to develop a coherent and viable regional security cooperation regime:⁸

- 1) Shared values and goals of common security and cooperation
- 2) Preference among the regional powers for a regime

- 3) Rejection of the idea of promoting security through expansion
- 4) An awareness of the high costs of war and the individualistic pursuit of (military) security.

Utilizing these four conditions as a guide, the Gulf Coalition Council, as an institution that has a doctrine based deeply in these very ideals, qualifies as a viable institution for CENTCOM to partner with and begin building the cooperative strategy that leads the way to collective security. Already possessing the necessary ideals, the only element the GCC lacks is legitimacy, an issue that will be explored later in this paper.

Another aspect for an effective TSC plan is the setting of clearly defined goals. This specific element will ensure continuity in effort by making sure each partner nation understands the direction the institution is headed. An example of such goals can be found in Figure 1

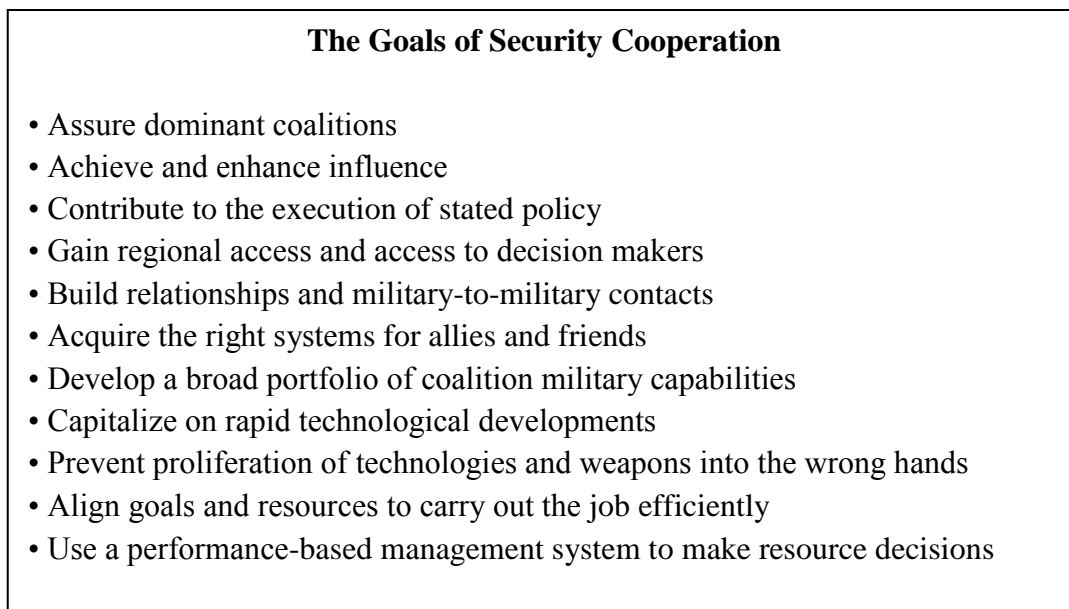


Figure 1

While each of these goals carries equal weight with respect to their level of importance in theater security, it is the goal of building relationships and military-to-military contacts that drives the focus of the argument presented in this paper.

Security initiatives typically start out as bilateral partnerships, which is where the United States has been for quite sometime in the Middle-East region, with a goal of then expanding to multilateral ones as cooperation improves. Ultimately, broad participation in the network is an important means to promote security and stability in the region. Thus, an atmosphere of broad inclusiveness expands the pool of resources for security issues and allows partnerships to leverage each country's comparative advantages, from expertise and facilities to information or even geography. This element of expansive partnering is precisely why the GCC was created and is what makes them an attractive candidate for CENTCOM planners to begin the shift from the current U.S. centric approach of regional security, to a new model that lets the Nations of the GCC lead the way.

GCC/ PSF (Who, What, Where, How)

The Arabian Peninsula commands significant U.S. attention and focus because of its importance to U.S. interests and the potential for insecurity. The Arab states on the Peninsula are the nations of the AOR most politically and commercially connected to the U.S. They are more developed economically and collectively wield defense forces far larger than any of their neighbors. Additionally, they are major providers of the world's energy resources. Because of the Peninsula's importance and its numerous common security challenges, the countries of the GCC/PSF are key partners in the developing regional security network.⁹

The Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] was established in an agreement concluded on 25 May 1981 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Figure 2 shows the countries of the GCC (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE). These countries declared that the GCC is established in view of the special relations between them, their similar political systems based on Islamic beliefs, joint destiny, and common objectives. The Council was formed to confront their security

challenges collectively. The immediate objective was to protect its members from the threats posed by the Iran-Iraq War and Iranian-inspired activist Islamism. In a series of meetings, chiefs of staff and defense ministers of the Gulf States developed plans for mutual defense and launched efforts to form a joint command and a joint defense network.¹⁰



Figure 2 Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries

In 1984 the GCC defense ministers agreed on the creation of a two-brigade (10,000-man) Peninsula Shield Force. This joint intervention force was based in Saudi Arabia near King Khalid Military City at Hafar al Batin under the command of a Saudi officer. In addition to a headquarters staff, the force consisted of one infantry brigade of about 5,000 men with elements from all GCC states.¹¹ In March 1991, after the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War, the six members of the GCC, together with Egypt and Syria, declared their intention to establish a deterrent force to protect Kuwait, with Egypt and Syria to providing the bulk of the troops and the GCC states providing the financing. Based on their conviction about the connected nature of

their security and that any aggression against any one of them is deemed an aggression against all of them makes the GCC a viable deterrent institution that is key to regional cooperative security effort. Moreover, the security challenges in an unstable regional environment, like the Gulf area, impose on the GCC States coordination of their policies and mobilization of their capabilities.

The Peninsula Shield Force (aka Peninsula Shield) is the military side of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (aka the Gulf Cooperation Council) and is intended to deter, and respond to, military aggression against any of the GCC member countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.¹² The GCC States seek to build up their defense forces according to a common conception. In this context, they have unified operational procedures, training, and military curricula. They also seek to accomplish compatibility of their military systems. Moreover the armed forces of the GCC States carry out joint military exercises with the Peninsula Shield Force, as well as joint air and sea maneuvers.

Ground and air units of the six member states carried out several multilateral exercises between 1983 and 1987 under the code name of Peninsula Shield. Military assistance, funded mainly by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, was extended to Bahrain for up-to- date fighter aircraft and a modern air base, and to Oman to improve its defensive capability at the Strait of Hormuz. The GCC plans to integrate naval and ground radar systems and to create a combined air control and warning system based on Saudi AWACS aircraft. They are also working toward an integrated air and missile defense network for the Gulf.¹³ These advances in military capability have been great improvements; however, they have produced little result and today, while the PSF possesses enormous potential it remains a symbolic force with little capability. Later, this paper will

explore in greater detail how the U.S. should engage to make this force, and the GCC as a whole, a more viable institution.

The future of Theater Security Cooperation in the CENTCOM region

Because of the Peninsula's importance and its numerous common security challenges, the countries of the Arabian Peninsula that make up the GCC should be lead partners in the developing regional security network. Incorporation of the GCC/PSF gives us a network within the region that is already established and focused on creating and maintaining partnerships for improving coordination and information sharing. Since its inception in 1981, during the Iran-Iraq war, the GCC has developed into a cohesive alliance integrated across military, economic, political, social and cultural endeavors. The GCC countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates already share a common political system, culture and strategic vision of their destiny as gulf countries. Diplomatically and politically, the GCC countries almost invariably speak with one voice on major issues. They have maintained a united front on issues as varied as the response to the crisis in Darfur, the Middle East Peace Talks, violence in Lebanon, the progress in stabilizing Iraq and foreign relations with Iran. Creating, or in the case of the GCC, substantiating partnerships in the region for improving coordination and information sharing through, Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Foreign Military Funding (FMF) programs, we can continue to build growing security networks that not only work to improve interoperability and overall effectiveness in providing security, but also one that builds trust and confidence among its neighbors and partners.

One way the United States can help in this endeavor is by increasing the support some of the countries are getting from the already established flow of resources and money of Foreign Military Sales (FMS) and Foreign Military Funding (FMF) programs. These have proven to play

a large role in solidifying efforts to creating functional security networks.¹⁴ Today the PSF faces challenges in material readiness, combat system and combat support interoperability, and appropriate manning. That is why U.S. support is crucial if this organization is to reach the level of legitimacy required for effective operations. However, despite its shortcomings, the Peninsula Shield Force has achieved some success including the establishing of a permanent Headquarters staff, yearly exercises, and two deployments to Kuwait as a show of force during the Iran-Iraq war and in 1994 in response to an Iraqi troop buildup on the Iraq-Kuwait border.

As a theme of cooperation matures within the region, this support will enhance the military operations of our partners, and will help to provide them with a stronger deterrence capability that hopefully negates the need for military action. While at the same time, should the need arise, a more capable and militarily advanced GCC/PSF would be a key component in increasing interoperability for future U.S. military presence and intervention. The GCC has the requisite diplomatic, economic and military capabilities to form a comprehensive regional security strategy that accomplishes the theater strategic objective of deterring aggression and resolving conflicts while maintaining sovereignty over their territories. Once fully established and executed correctly, an effective TSC plan within the CENTCOM AOR that encompasses these nations would have a dramatic effect in the prevention or resolve of future conflicts within the region.

Counterargument

An issue that many theorists have dubbed “The Free Rider problem” is arguably one of the greatest concerns to the advancement of true collective security within the CENTCOM region.¹⁵ Stating that...“If the U.S. can be counted on to preserve the independence of GCC states for its own strategic purpose, then local rulers are free to structure their diplomacy and

military strategy to meet other objectives. As a result, while procurement programs burgeoned in the 1990's, cooperative endeavors stagnated, the 5,000 strong PSF, located in Saudi Arabia is today no larger than it was when it was formed in the late 1980's."¹⁶ Basically, each country is more inclined to seek the security of an external security guarantor in the form of the United States, rather than in the enhancements of the collective capabilities of the GCC itself. Evidence of this trend can be seen by analyzing the history of U.S. presence in the Gulf and the fact that it has taken the lead in almost every major conflict and that it still continues to this day to bear the responsibility of the regions security and stability.

The current security model in the CENTCOM region, as well as those developed in the past, has the GCC states overly reliant on the U.S. and its Western allies for security. The people, those mostly affected by the security of the region, play a very small roll in how it is designed, implemented and preserved. This trend must be reversed and CENTCOM planners have to institute a dramatic shift from a U.S. centric approach to one where the security and stability of the region is the product of the people who live there with the help of outside partners only for assistance.

Another counter to the thesis of this paper, and one that CENTCOM planners will have to address is the role religious identity and culture play in the theme of cooperation. More specifically, because of the diverse religious environment that makes up the GCC nations as well the Gulf as a whole, many would argue that there can never be an atmosphere of cooperation between those in the region and the United States. This idea does carry some validity. On numerous occasions through out recent conflicts within the region the U.S. offered help and was either refused or was allowed to help but only under a cloak of deception as to the amount of aid and by whom it was being provided. Again looking at both Gulf wars where on each occasion

the United States, in some instances, was denied access to specific countries for either staging of forces or simply the movement of the forces through specific areas because of religious ideologies and cultural beliefs that would not allow certain nations to accept aid or be seen as offering it.¹⁷ This cultural rift could spark increasing internal instability and unrest resulting in some GCC nations demanding the exit of U.S. military personnel. The population views these forces as occupying forces-- occupying a holy Muslim lands. This response is a real problem and domestic conditions in the GCC States could make a continued U.S. military presence increasingly difficult and will most certainly play out in a way that could derail or hinder the U.S. goals of advancing cooperation within the region.

The existence of these issues is precisely why the U.S. should turn to the GCC as the lead entity in a new security cooperation model. The GCC is an inherently Islamic organization seeking to promote Islamic interests and they “live in the region.” Their agenda and efforts will have more legitimacy with the people of the Middle East than will an effort perceived as directed by the United States.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Gulf War, the United States, together with its regional partners, has constructed a regional security architecture composed of a forward U.S. military presence, pre-positioned military equipment, and essential access to host nation facilities. While this has been a good approach in the past, recent conflicts have demonstrated that previous security paradigms and architectures for the region have been insufficient to promoting stability and security in the globalized post-Cold War environment.

The concept of engagement is not new. In fact, almost since its inception the United States military has interacted with foreign militaries during peacetime in the hopes of creating a stable and effective security regime that can be relied upon in future operations. Each of the military services regularly conducts exchanges, formally and informally, to improve military capability or interoperability of our regional partners. Within the boundaries of the Gulf, this cooperation is no different than security architectures seen in the past. It is arguably one of the more crucial due to the people and resources that make-up the region. Unfortunately for the U.S. and for those who rely on the success of this theater, security cooperation has failed and the region remains volatile and vulnerable to common security threats.

Thus, a new, comprehensive GCC led theater security cooperation strategy focused on working with regional partners to boost host nation defense capabilities, advancing U.S.-coalition interoperability through foreign military sales and training; and finally regional engagement through joint military exercises and regional security conferences must be implemented to ensure nations within the region work together to build the trust and confidence required to pursue resolution to these common interests. A new Theater Security Cooperation model characterized by a focus on common interests, inclusivity, and capacity-building is best suited to advance security and stability in the CENTCOM region. A growing network of partnered nations not only works to improve interoperability and overall effectiveness in providing security, it also builds trust and confidence among neighbors and partners.

The security and stability in the Gulf, is not only a regional issue but it is also a global issue considering the strategic importance of the region. The responsibility for the security of the Arabian Gulf region lies first on its own people, which is a key factor to finding a regional organization such as the Gulf Cooperation Council to lead the way in a new collective security

endeavor. "...security of the Gulf is the responsibility of its own people, but some alliances are needed to protect such a vital region in the world."¹⁸ As the United States, and in particular CENTCOM, moves forward they must understand and continually convey the idea that no nation can get it alone.

Three decades after the bloody Iran-Iraq war, two decades after the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait and with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq still raging, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are still searching for an effective strategy to stave off the host of challenges and crises that continue to haunt the region and its peoples.¹⁹ In its nearly 30 years of existence, the GCC has struggled to maintain a unified alliance and Gulf security remains elusive and fragile. There is a desperate need for a new Gulf security architecture that is not US centric and one that truly promotes the idea of partnerships and collectively security.

Recommendations

The stability and security of the United States and its partner nations hinge upon our ability to work together in a mutual effort to confront and defeat common security challenges. Regional partnerships comprised of capable and willing nations build mutual security, deter aggression and extremism, and provide the underlying conditions for success if military action is required. As discussed above, CENTCOM planners have missed the mark at this endeavor with past security architectures, so the following list of recommendations is offered for consideration as we move forward towards a new architecture:

1. Continue traditional capacity building programs: FMF/FMS/IMET

A. FMF/FMS: These funds help to promote regional stability and strengthen U.S. partnerships with moderate governments friendly to U.S. interests. With FMF, we seek to boost the

legitimate defense needs of partner countries to help to strengthen and modernize their self-defense capabilities, safeguard their borders and territorial waters, meet their legitimate indigenous security needs, increase their interoperability with U.S. forces and support coalition efforts in the war on terrorism.

- B. IMET: Military-to-military contacts afforded by the IMET program are particularly important in this region, paying dividends far into the future as students rise up the military and political ranks of their respective countries. Strong IMET and military training programs have demonstrated the importance of IMET in fostering one-to-one relationships with the U.S., enabling countries to obtain technical training necessary to maintain U.S.-origin equipment and increasing awareness of international norms of human rights and civilian control of the military.

2. Promote Regional Security Conferences

Regional security conferences provide an ideal forum for discussing the challenges and opportunities facing the region. Holding regular seminars on security cooperation, constructing hotlines, exchanging liaison officials, carrying out training observation programs, and sharing information can enhance the alliance and foster collective security. Since their inception, the ministers of the GCC nations have met yearly at a forum known as the Kuwait Summit – Motivated by their shared vision of a stable, peaceful and prosperous Middle East, and acting within a framework of partnership, ministers of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) continually meet to affirm their commitment to continue their cooperation in promoting regional security and peace. Recently, there has been an addition of yet another forum that further enhances the architecture of collective security known as the Manama dialogue. This IISS Regional Security Summit was convened in the Kingdom of Bahrain from 11 to 13 December 2009, and brought

together the national security establishments of the nine regional Gulf countries and other key outside powers. The U.S. should continue promoting these conferences and more importantly use them as a vehicle to establish and maintain a new cooperative strategy.

3. Multi-National Exercises

Currently CENTCOM hosts and conducts military exercises throughout the region with national and international partners to promote cooperation in response to crises and conflict deterrence. Examples of these exercises are such like, Eagle Resolve - which is an annual, multi-national exercise designed to enhance regional cooperative defense efforts and is focused on promoting a common understanding of defense concepts and procedures. Eagle Resolve is an exercise for crisis management and counter-terrorism and aims to strengthen cooperation between participating States. Another example would be, Bright Star – this is a biennial, multi-national exercise designed to strengthen military-to-military relationships and improve readiness and interoperability between U.S. and participating partner nations. The recommendation from this paper is that CENTCOM should continue to conduct these exercises but should expand them to include the Nations of the GCC. Additionally, CENTCOM has been the leading agent for planning and conducting these exercises since they began. Thus, as CENTCOM planners move forward and embark upon a new era of inclusion and diversification of responsibilities with regards to security cooperation, they should allow the nations of the GCC plan these and other exercises so that the themes and requirements they view as important get exercised. Exercises like Bright Star and Eagle Resolve are essential to international team building and will positively affect regional and possibly global military responses in the future.

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